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2008

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/10060/>

MPRA Paper No. 10060, posted 16 Aug 2008 10:53 UTC

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***Making the Link: Affirmative Action and Employment Relations***

No.19, 2008 ISBN No: 978-1-74138-299-0

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To cite this article: Murray, P., Parr, N., & Syed, J. (2008). Executive women at work. In M. Baird, E. Davis, P. McGraw, & V. Pratt (Eds), *Making the Link: Affirmative Action and Employment Relations*. No. 19, pp. 56-62. Sydney: CCH Australia Ltd.

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## Appendix 4

# Executive Women at Work

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**This paper tracks the representation of executive women at work. First, the paper discusses the significant deficit of female managers (ABS 2007a), and a marked decline of women professionals from their mid to late 30s. Significant differences in age and sex distributions are evident between different occupational groups, and discriminatory practices continue to play a role. We discuss the implications of these patterns. Second, the paper describes how labour-management policies might address the more salient gender issues. Our findings suggest that while some common “old” perceptions related to women as apparently more suited to particular professions are slowly being reversed, better policies related to equal representation are required.**

## Introduction

This paper tracks the representation of executive women at work. First, while women are entering the professions at higher rates than men, there remains a significant deficit of female managers (ABS 2007a), and a marked decline of women professionals from their mid to late 30s. According to 2006 census data, only 34 percent of managers are female. The first part of this paper discusses these trends and some background issues that are embedded in workplace cultures. Second, the paper describes how labour-management policies might address the more salient gender issues. We suggest that organisations must revisit their company-wide values in an effort to improve the status of women. While access for women to a whole range of professions is increasing, job and age-type perceptions are common. Although fully articulated diversity management programs are evident, rich traditions in some professions continue to inhibit women in reaching their true potential.

While the percentage formed by females has been increasing over time, females are still in the minority, forming about 45 percent of the labour force in 2007 (ABS, 2007b). However, marked differences in age and sex distributions are evident between different occupational groups. We discuss the implications of these patterns. The age and sex distributions of occupational groups also have important implications

for understanding the demography of income and consumer behaviour (Assael, 1998). In this paper, we place particular emphasis on the role and participation of women. Our findings suggest that some common “old” perceptions related to women, as apparently more suited to particular professions, are slowly being reversed.

## Background to Gender Issues

Affirmative action policies embody an equitable set of values with an aim to actively promote women into management positions when skills are at least equivalent to their male counterparts. The problem is that access for women into management positions has been slow, and although legislation has provided some impetus for labour-management policy, equity through gender programs has been sporadic at best. One possible reason for this slow access is the removal of goals and targets from the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act of 1999. Moreover, less emphasis has been placed on the collection and monitoring of employment statistics. Organisations place little priority on clear goals and performance indicators relating to diversity (Strachan et al., 2004), suggesting that measuring the success of diversity programs are difficult. Women’s participation in work has increased over time, especially in part-time and casual work, yet earnings gaps compared to their male cohorts is still pronounced (EOWA, 2006). For every male dollar earned from full-time work in Australia, full-time working women earn approximately 84 cents. When part-time work is added into the equation, the differential is more than 44 cents between male and female earnings. This differential extends to “traditional” female job types such as education where the gap in full-time earnings is 11.7 percent in men’s favour (Farouque, 2004). Females lag even further behind males in their retirement savings (known in Australia as “superannuation”) (Parr et al. 2007). In contrast, females represent only 35 percent of working age (15-64) people who do less than five hours unpaid domestic work per week and 86 percent of those who do 30 or more hours of such work per week (ABS, 2007a). Given the rich history of workplace discrimination in Australia, traditional perceptions have arguably added to inequality for women.

Australian policies relating to diversity management have traditionally relied on employer intervention to promote workplace equity. Since the 1990s, there has been a general shift from a collectivist to an individualist approach (Strachan et al. 2004). Policies are now based on institutional solutions to the problem of workforce diversity and gender discrimination, leading to a variety

of managerial and institutional approaches. For instance, at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a 10 percent gap still existed in the basic pay levels between male and female earnings. Research showed that this gap was far greater for over-award pay, women earning less than 50 percent of the over-award amounts paid to men (Rance 2003). This has led many observers to comment that competent women continue to emigrate out of senior roles and organisations are surprised when they go, and that old corporate assumptions and norms need to be challenged (Rance, 2003: 30). Adding to these structural issues has been the increasing trend in sex-discrimination complaints reported to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC, 2002-2003).

During the period between 2002 and 2003, HREOC received 380 complaints under the Sex Discrimination Act which compared to 288 complaints in 1999-2000. This shows a 32 percent increase in sex-discrimination cases over a period of just three years. A large majority of these complaints related to employment issues (approximately 87 percent). About 35 percent of the complaints related to pregnancy issues. It is worth noting that despite the traditional gender-focus on labour policies in Australia, the sex-discrimination category was the second highest complaint area (31 percent), second only to disability complaints (40 percent) (*HREOC Annual Report 2002-2003*). The report by HREOC attributes improvements generally to increased public awareness and ongoing policy work on pregnancy related issues. A rise in awareness and better reporting however has not led to wholesale decreases in workplace incidences. For instance, a 5 percent increase was reported in pregnancy-related complaints. This confirms a recent report that the more subtle pervasive forms of discrimination continue to constrain women to peripheral, insecure, and less valued positions (Gender policies backfiring, 2003). The policy implication of this issue is that legislation alone is not enough; regular audits and effective monitoring is required to identify gender discrimination in

**Table 1: Sex Discrimination Complaints Received in 2002-2003**

Issue	Complaints	%
Pregnancy	230	35
Sex – direct	184	28
Sexual harassment	172	27
Marital status	25	4
Family responsibility, parental status	19	3
Victimisation	21	3
Total	651	100

Source: HREOC Annual Report 2002-2003

employment which remains an embedded problem in Australian organisations. Table 1 provides a brief account of complaints received at HREOC under the Sex Discrimination Act. It should be noted that 87 percent of complaints were attributed to various employment contexts, and only 13 percent to other areas. Table 2 is a description of the number of complaints received across all employment contexts.

## Census Data on Females in the Professions and Managerial Occupations

We now turn our attention to data acquired from the 2006 census of Australia. Data on a person's occupation were collected specifically for the main area of work in the week before the census. Responses were coded using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) (ABS, 2006). The classification of occupations, which reflects the level and type of skills involved, differs somewhat from the classification used for earlier censuses (ABS, 1997, 2006).

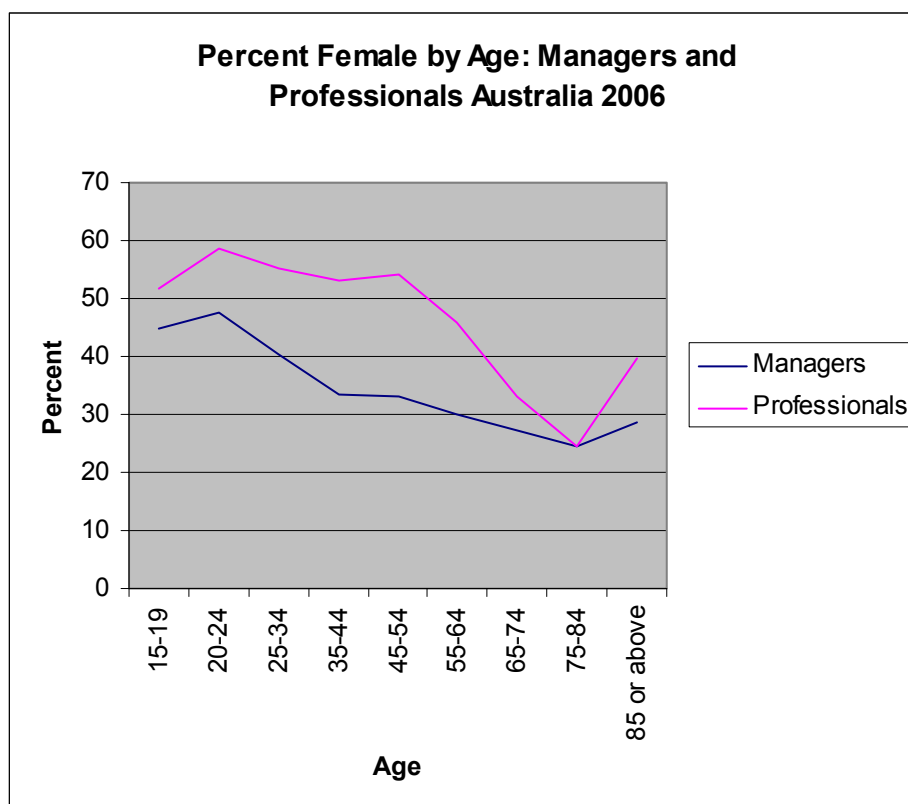
The 2006 census found that females formed 52.9 percent of those employed in a professional occupation, a modest increase from 52.6 percent at the 2001 census and 51.1 percent at the 1996 census. The percentage formed by females is comfortably above the 46 percent of all employed persons they represented, and much above the 34 percent of managers represented (Table 3). While women represent the majority across "all" professionals, males form the majority of "most" professions, with females outnumbering males in only 10 of the 31 (minor)

**Table 2. Sex Discrimination Complaints**

Context	Total	%
Employment	568	87
Goods, services and facilities	39	6
Administration of Commonwealth laws and programs	17	3
Education	9	1
Clubs	7	1
Trade unions, accrediting bodies	6	1
Application forms etc	4	1
Accommodation	1	-
Total	651	100

Source: HREOC Annual Report 2002-2003

Figure 1



groups of professions identified (Table 4). Generally speaking, the female-dominated professions are ones with lower status and pay. For example, the clerical and administrative workers and community and personal service workers (Table 3), and midwifery and nursing, as well as social and welfare professionals (Table 4), are a case in point. The female percentage varies widely by profession (Table 4). At one end of the scale, there are more than 10 male air and marine transport

professionals and engineering professionals to every female, whilst at the other there are more than 10 female midwifery and nursing professionals to every male.

Females form the majority of all professionals (male and female) between the ages of 15 and 55 (Figure 1). The percentage that is female declines noticeably between the ages of 25 and 44, which may reflect the rate at which females leave the workforce for maternity reasons. If the latter represents the main reasons behind falling representation, then there are a much smaller percentage of women actually returning to work at a later stage. Similarly, as recent scholars suggest, the task complexity of combining work and family activities increases which is a form of statistical discrimination (Blair-Loy, 2001; Murray & Syed, 2008). The sharp reduction in the percentage of professionals who are female above age 50 would in part be a legacy of the legal and social constraints and disincentives which prevented women from pursuing education and entering professional careers in the past (Evans, 1996). It may also be that some of the steep reduction in female professionals above the age of 45 similarly reflects inadequate labour-management policies that have discriminated against women on the basis of both age and job-type characteristics. We contend that even in the traditional female-dominated professions such as nursing and teaching, labour policies have been inadequate in encouraging job longevity.

Part of the explanation of the dramatic changes in the percentage female by age of professionals with age lies in the marked changes over time in the percentage of female enrolments in higher education courses, and the flow on effect on new entrants to the professions. The percentage of all higher education students who were female increased from 21 percent in 1949 to 55 percent in

Table 3: Women by Occupation

Occupation, 2006	% Female
Clerical and Administrative Workers	76.8
Community and Personal Service Workers <sup>1</sup>	68.8
Labourers	36.5
Machinery Operators and Drivers	10.4
Managers	34.4
Professionals	52.9
Sales Workers	61.7
Technicians and Trades Workers	14.7
Inadequately described	35.7
Not stated	45.7
Total	46.1

Source: ABS 2006 Census Data Online <http://www.abs.gov.au>  
Date accessed 15 May 2008

**Table 4. Percentage of Females by Profession: Australia 2006**

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Percent Female (%)</b>
Arts and Media Professionals, nfd	38.9
Arts Professionals	42.8
Media Professionals	45.8
Business, Human resource and Marketing Professionals	45.6
Accountants, Auditors and Company Secretaries	46.2
Financial Brokers and Dealers and Investment Advisors	32.9
Human Resource and Training Professionals	62.8
Information and Organisation Professionals	47.5
Sales, Marketing and Public Relations Professionals	48.0
Design, Engineering, Science and Transport Professionals nfd	18.1
Air and Marine Transport Professionals	5.5
Architects, Designers, Planners and Surveyors	39.6
Engineering Professionals	7.8
Natural and Physical Science Professionals	41.6
Education Professionals nfd	57.6
School Teachers	73.9
Tertiary Education Teachers	47.7
Miscellaneous Education Professionals	72.1
Health Professionals nfd	66.8
Health Diagnostic and Promotion Professionals	59.6
Health Therapy Professionals	65.4
Medical Practitioners	35.4
Midwifery and Nursing Professionals	91.1
ICT Professionals nfd	18.2
Business and Systems Analysts and Programmers	20.0
Database and Systems Administrators, and ICT Security	23.6
ICT Network and Support Professionals	14.8
Legal, Social and Welfare Professionals nfd	49.1
Legal Professionals	41.4
Social and Welfare Professionals	65.3
Professional nfd	52.3

Source: ABS 2006 Census Data Online. <http://www.abs.gov.au> Date accessed 15 May 2008



2006 (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training 2003, ABS 2008). Moreover female students are now more successful in their higher education studies than males. The effects of withdrawal from the labour force following childbirth (both short and long-term), would be very much a secondary reason for the decline in the percentage female with age for most professions (Birrell et al., 1995). Another important explanation for increased participation by women over time is the introduction and amendment of legislation. Both the Sex Discrimination Act of 1984 and the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act of 1999 have ensured that minimum standards exist in relation to equality in labour-management policies such as recruiting. The latter act amends the Affirmative Action Act of 1986 and provides a basis by which companies (particularly those employing more than 1,000), offer equal access to work regardless of sex. This legislation is reflected in policies to retain female workers and in some countries, quota-like hiring to ensure that the workforce mirrors that of the local labour market (De Cieri & Kramar, 2008).

**Table 5. Percentage of Females by Type of Managerial Occupation: Australia 2006**

Classification	Percent Female (%)
Chief Executives, General Managers and Legislators	19.9
Farmers and Farm Managers	25.3
Specialist Managers	28.5
Advertising and Sales Managers	33.6
Business Administration Managers	50.1
Construction, Distribution and Production Managers	12.4
Education, Health and Welfare Services Managers	64.8
ICT Managers	21.6
Miscellaneous Specialist Managers	27.2
Hospitality, Retail and Service Managers	47.1
Accommodation, and Hospitality Managers	50.1
Retail Managers	46.0
Miscellaneous Hospitality, Retail and Service Managers	38.0
Managers	30.5

Source: ABS 2006 Census Data Online <http://www.abs.gov.au>  
Date accessed 15 May 2008

The success of women in entering professional occupations contrasts sharply with their success in entering management. The percentage of managers who are female has barely risen above one-third (Table 5). Females form the majority in only 3 out of 14 categories of managers (two of these cases by very small margins). Of particular concern is that they account for less than a fifth of the high-end “chief executives, general managers and legislators” category, which confirms more recent statistics of low female executive representation by the Australian Census of Women in Leadership (EOWA, 2006). At each age, females are in the minority of managers (Figure 1). The percentage of managers who are female drops considerably after age 25. This pattern reflects the greater disadvantage of females in the past and the difficulties women still experience in combining a career and family.

Many economic and social factors underpin increased participation by women in the workplace. Consistent with other Asia Pacific Rim countries such as New Zealand and Malaysia, women in Australia with children are increasingly remaining in the workforce, both as part of dual-career couples, and as single-parent families. Dual-career couples have increased from 51.7 percent of couple families with children in 1992 to 56.7 percent in 2002 (ABS, 2003). The growth of single-parent workers is a world-wide phenomenon with more than half of all U.S. children living in a single-parent family (Haar & Spell, 2003: 45). Working mothers exceed 25 percent of all working families in both New Zealand and the U.S. In Australia, labour-force participation of one-parent families with children aged 15 or under increased from 40.6 percent in 1992 to 46.2 percent in 2002 and has increased again in the 2008 census. Such socio-economic factors place increasing demands on labour-management receptiveness to provide equal access for women throughout their careers as well as equal access to managerial roles. We define labour-management receptiveness as “the capacity of a firm’s labour-management policies to remove discriminatory practices related to age-based and job-type employment and to promote equality through equity in all labour-management programs” (see Parr & Murray, 2004). We discuss the implications of these below.

## Implications for Labour-Management Policy

We contend that information on the demographics of labour participation is important to policy planners both in government and business for four broad reasons: 1) for identifying prospective retirement bulges and labour shortages, 2) in the analysis of career progressions and the appropriateness of organisational structures (Morrison, 1993; Foot & Venne, 1990; Foot & Stoffman, 1996), 3) in the need to create appropriate labour-management policies (de Cieri & Kramar, 2008), 4) in the need to increase the representation of both female managers and professionals, and 5) in the need to create a true multicultural solution to diversity in the Australian workforce. While legislation provides some impetus for labour-management receptiveness, equal

employment policies are not evident in over two-thirds of all Australian business (De Cieri & Kramar, 2008). This is despite the reality that many socio-economic factors accounting for increased participation by women have been known for some time. These include: increased demands for semi-skilled female workers, attraction to work-related identities as opposed to marriage-related ones, and the need for women to return to work due to financial family pressures (Murray & Syed, 2008). Women now form a majority in the entry-level age groups for some professions previously dominated by males.

While some employers are finding creative ways to implement affirmative action programs, particularly in the case of larger employers, our analysis reveals that women continue to be underrepresented in managerial positions (Table 5). The new predominantly female cohorts entering the professions may often find themselves subordinate to an "old-guard" of older male managers and older male colleagues within their professions. We suggest that labour policies require further fine-tuning in changing the perceptions towards women in the workplace. We propose that the traditional focus on gender needs to be broadened and made more appropriate to both the needs of working women but also because of the increasing labour demands by organisations. Diversity policies should also focus on the inclusion of women from NESB backgrounds. New labour-management policies are required in the workplace to achieve gender equity through target setting and monitoring. Both positive and negative incentives are also required.

Particular kinds of labour-management policies appear to be more successful than others. In some companies, slogans relating to work-life balance are more symbolic as it is difficult for employees to "catch up" on the balance of hours owed to a company when taking time off work. Many programs are accordingly restricted or off-limits to most employees. Similarly, companies pay lip-service to programs that train women in managerial roles. One exception to this is Johnson and Johnson's gender/equity program where a number of women are seconded to participate in management board activities on a rotational program (Donaldson, 2002). Other policies relating to work-life integration as distinct from work-life balance is more important to some companies such as Cisco Systems. Work-life integration enables employees to plan their own personal lives around their work outcomes so that goals relating to both are fulfilled (Donaldson, 2003). Employers have also been criticised for allowing important skills to be lost to the organisation during child-rearing years and this may, among other things, partly explain the reason for a sharp decline in female participation beyond the age of 40. Some organisations such as the Bank of Melbourne assist women to remain healthy throughout their working pregnancy, helping to ensure that working mothers return to work soon after (O'Connor, 2002). What is notable here is a shift in values towards women workers in providing extra care and in valuing skills that would be otherwise lost to the organisation. In following Parr and Murray (2004), we suggest that labour-management receptiveness can be

controlled and adjusted so that organisational commitment by different groups (such as women professionals) can be increased. This is as much about reassessing organisational values and common perceptions related to women in the workplace as it is developing well-defined policies.

## Conclusion

Looking to the future, the prospect is one of the increasing retirement of older cohorts that are predominantly male coupled with an increasing trend towards newer predominantly female cohorts in the professions. The imbalance however of female professionals to males is unlikely to grow, so that the overall balance between the numbers of male and female managers is likely to become somewhat more even. Labour-management policies will need to ensure adequate access for women into traditional male dominated domains including managerial positions and other professional areas where females have been poorly represented previously. As discussed, there remains for instance a significant gap between female professionals as a total of all professionals. This indicates that firms need new policies related to work/family issues; currently, job discrimination prevents women from returning to the workplace in the great majority of work places which is not sustainable given the shortage of skilled labour. With an increasing number of younger women professionals entering the workplace, there will need to be a greater emphasis on more even representation in the future. While the issues discussed in this paper appear to be important to firms, actionable programs that delineate importance from performance in gender issues are still some way off.

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